

**Testimony Appropriations Committee  
Governor's Budget Mitigation Plan  
Karen Zeligman-Newberg  
11 March 2010**

Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, members of the committee. My name is Karen Zeligman-Newberg. I am a Social Worker and a lifetime resident of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

As a Social Worker, I have chosen to work with people living with HIV/AIDS as I strongly believe they are victims of severe political injustice. In 2008, I was an intern and had the opportunity to observe and work in the Hartford Syringe Exchange Van.

The workers on the van know their clientele very well and are well received by them. The familiarity and strong level of earned trust was very obvious. In order to receive clean syringes used ones must be turned in to replace it; adherence to funder's requirements was strictly adhered to.

The cost benefit is clear.<sup>4</sup> The CDC reports that "HIV prevention has also generated substantial economic benefits. For every HIV infection that is prevented, an estimated \$355,000 is saved in the cost of providing lifetime HIV treatment,<sup>12</sup> resulting in significant cost-savings for the health care system."<sup>4</sup>

People who are injecting drug users *want* to have access to *clean* syringes. The van also supplies items such as alcohol wipes, hygiene kits, male and female condoms, and more importantly kindness, empathy and an authentic listening ear.

The Syringe Exchange Van promotes safety. Funding has already been cut through the governor's rescissions last fall and the program lost one of the staff who works on the van. By making even deeper cuts to this program, the spread of HIV/AIDS will eventually rise again creating a vicious cyclical pattern. This program works, and works well. Over the past 10 years we've seen a 33% decline in newly reported HIV/AIDS cases among injecting drug users.

Some would like to believe people should behave and live in certain ways such as not using intravenous drugs. Addiction is addiction and it will continue. If the state of Connecticut *knowingly* removes safety measures by instituting these cuts, the great potential for the spread of HIV/AIDS continues.

The proposed budget is completely unacceptable to the future of Connecticut. The depletion of funds to this population in need is deplorable.

I would like end with a quote from "Rabbi Hillel, Jewish scholar & theologian

If I am not for myself, who will be for me?

If I am not for others, what am I?"

And if not now, when?" (30 BC - 9 AD)

Thank you for your time.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

#### References:

4. <sup>4</sup> Holtgrave DR. Written testimony on HIV/AIDS incidence and prevention for the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. September 16, 2008. Available at <http://oversight.house.gov/documents/20080916115223.pdf>. (Accessed July 8, 2009)

12. <sup>12</sup> Schackman BR, Gebo KA, Walensky RP, et al. The lifetime cost of current human immunodeficiency virus care in the United States. Med Care 2006 Nov;44(11):990-97.

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